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* BJP's Use of Hindutva Seen Key to Surge

* Rise Termed 'Remarkable'

91AS1006A Calcutta SUNDAY in English 18 May 91 pp 31-39

[Article by Shiraz Sidhva/Bihar and New Delhi; italicized words as published]

[Text] Lal Krishna Advani knows what happens to people who stick to the middle of the road: they get run over. From the time he took over as president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the deceptively soft-spoken leader has transformed his party into an assertive, aggressive force for Hindu nationalism.

Last week, it began to seem as though Advani's strategy had paid off. Reports streamed in from all over India of a massive rise in support for the BJP. Everywhere that Advani and his fellow leader A.B. Vajpayee went, they found receptions whose warmth far exceeded that in 1989 when the BJP won a record 88 seats.

"I think we are witnessing a wave," Advani told SUNDAY at his New Delhi residence. "All right, Vajpayee and Advani may get a good response because they have been touring the country. But what about Dr Joshi (Murli Manohar Joshi who succeeded Advani as party president)? Even he is getting a tremendous welcome. That is the really heartening thing."

Others within the BJP shared their leader's optimism. There was a palpable sense of achievement in the ranks and a feeling that at last power was within the party's grasp. In Uttar Pradesh [UP] where the BJP has been a perennial also-ran, it was a clear number one in some constituencies. In the Janata Dal [JD] stronghold of Bihar, the party had made impressive gains and Advani was gratified by the response his tour received. In Gujarat, the local unit spoke of a wave. And in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, where there are BJP governments in power, the party was confident of holding onto its seats.

The sudden rise in the BJP's fortunes worried other parties. V.P. Singh's Janata Dal limped along as its leaders feared that the BJP would cut into its votes in UP. And even Rajiv Gandhi's caravan rethought what should have been a triumphant progress each time it halted at cow-belt towns; local Congress leaders warned their president that a Ram wave appeared to be building up.

By week's end, Advani was buoyant enough to brag about securing an overall majority (though the party's internal assessment gave it 120 seats). "I am optimistic," he beamed. "When there is a wave, anything can happen."

Yet, such is the nature of the Indian electoral system that waves in public opinion often turn into ripples when it comes to winning seats. Traditionally, the BJP has lacked the support (outside of Madhya Pradesh and, perhaps, Rajasthan, if you exclude smaller pockets such as Himachal) required to translate its popularity into votes.

This time too, there were fears that even if the cheers translated into votes, those votes might not translate into seats (see box) [not shown]. The BJP has usually coped with this by entering into seat adjustments with other opposition parties and facing the Congress(I) on a one-to-one basis. Last time, its share of the popular vote went up to 11.4 percent from 7.4 percent in 1984, but this four percent rise was enough to account for 86 more seats! In 1984, the BJP won two seats. In 1989, it won 88. In large part, the seat adjustments with the Janata Dal helped account for the rise.

In 1991, Advani is gambling that the old rules are dead. "We are not going to win seats on the basis of an anti-Congress vote or an anti-establishment vote," he says. "We are winning because of a positive vote for the BJP."

It is a gamble that might just come off. The party's aggressive tom-tomming of the Ram agenda has won it a measure of support from people who were unwilling to take it seriously while it was perceived as an RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh] front masquerading as a centrist party. Nobody says that this avatar of the BJP is run by the RSS from behind the scenes: Advani has given it a strong identity of its own through such devices as his *rath yatra*.

Moreover, as much as he may deny that the party is profiting from an anti-establishment vote, the fact is that the BJP stands to gain from a protest vote. In 1989, public disillusionment with Rajiv Gandhi in north India turned the Congress out of office. And in 1991, the voters are unlikely to forgive V.P. Singh, whose government lasted for just about a year.

Hence, the core of the BJP's appeal: give us a chance. For an electorate that has still to forget its disillusionment with Rajiv or overcome its anger with V.P. Singh, Advani offers a third alternative. Because the BJP has never held office, his halo is intact and his record is not tainted by failure.

Says one of the younger BJP leaders: "That's a good package, isn't it? No record of having messed up and a pride in Hindutva. Can anyone match that?"

Cliches about iron fists in velvet gloves fail to capture the essence of L.K. Advani, though they come close. In person, he is quiet, reticent and mild-mannered. His refusal to assert himself is so complete that detractors often draw uncomplimentary parallels with Uriah Heep. But the politics are in total contrast to the personal style. His dream of Hindutva and his willingness to use Ram to win votes far exceed anything more assertive leaders like Vajpayee could ever have dreamt of. At party conclaves, the lamb turns into a lion: he can be firm, unbending and utterly committed to an uncompromising vision of India.

His triumph has been in making the BJP stop apologising for itself. While Vajpayee and the others failed to translate Hinduism into politics, Advani has found the magic formula for cloaking an essentially communal appeal in terms that seem entirely above board. "I will not be defensive. We have been defensive for too long," he told SUNDAY last week.

It is a familiar theme mainly because Advani has taken it to the length and breadth of India. He is not against minorities; his opposition is to minorityism in which Muslims and others are needlessly pampered. He is all for secularism; he is only against pseudo-secularism, i.e., a secularism that discriminates against Hindus. And so on.

Political philosophers may find these distinctions disingenuous, but Advani has managed to make them stick. His greatest achievement has been to harness Hindu resentment and repackage it as national pride.

You can see him as a man who has profited from a fortuitous turn of events. Or you can see him as a man who manipulated those events. But over the last two years or so, Advani has seized the political initiative.

In 1986, when the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi controversy first hit the headlines, Advani was nowhere to be found. By 1989, however, he had made the issue his own. And in 1990, he played his master-stroke by embarking on a bizarre symbolic mission to reclaim the mosque in the name of Ram.

Within the BJP, they regard the *rath yatra* as a turning point for the party. In 1989, it had won 88 seats, but the vote had many sources, including, as Advani himself admits, "the electorate's desire to get rid of Rajiv." Nevertheless, even then, the party had attacked 'minorityism' and tried to capitalise on Hindu resentment of the manner in which Muslims were 'being pampered'.

When V.P. Singh took office, Advani was careful to keep his distance. He was bitter about an experience on the campaign trail when the Raja had refused to appear on a platform unless the BJP flag was removed and mistrustful of Singh personally. He recognised that the party had no future as part of an Opposition alliance—it would always be regarded as an embarrassment by centrist parties—and yet, was troubled by the BJP's inability to win seats without electoral alliances. Consequently, he did nothing to rock the boat and held his peace even when he violently disagreed with the Janata Dal government's policies. He knew that the BJP had to strike out on its own—but to do so at the wrong time was to commit political hara-kiri.

In the end, V.P. Singh left him with no choice. In his 15 August, 1990, address to the nation, the Prime Minister outlined the contours of a support coalition he wanted to create for the Janata Dal. V.P. Singh's vision of the Dal as a party of backwards and minorities that swore by socialism made it clear to Advani that it was only a matter of time before the BJP was turned out by the Raja.

As the realisation sunk in, there was gloom throughout the party's ranks. Asked one MP [member of Parliament] from Rajasthan, "How do we fight Mandal and these blatant appeals on the basis of caste?" Finally, it was Advani who found the answer: the *rath yatra*.

Only five years before, the notion of a procession in which the BJP president stood on a converted Toyota van with a garishly-painted lotus plastered by its side would have seemed unthinkable. It is impossible to imagine Vajpayee consorting with Hindi movie extras dressed up to look like Ram; unimaginable to conceive of him being weighed in blood or firing arrows from what was meant to represent Ram's bow.

It was Advani who broke with precedent to do all this. He alone recognised that there was only one method of converting simmering Hindu resentment into aggressive support for the BJP: pop religion.

While the BJP and the Jan Sangh—mindful of the sneers about being RSS fronts—had struggled to separate ritual from politics for decades, Advani overturned that policy at a stroke. Recognising that the Punjab problem and the Muslim personal law controversy would only anger Hindus, not turn them into BJP voters, he drew inspiration from another contemporary phenomenon: the TV-induced popularity of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*.

His instinct paid off. The *rath yatra* topped V.P. Singh's government, gave the BJP an impressive support base and transformed Advani into one of the two most important political leaders in India.

Advani's BJP has broken with the tradition of distancing the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or the Bajrang Dal. The VHP's massive Delhi rally last month was used for political speeches by BJP leaders. "VHP, BJP, we are all one," Vasundhara Raje, a party MP from Rajasthan, told SUNDAY at the rally.

And throughout this campaign, Advani has remembered to respect ritual and revere Ram. Last week, he went from village to village in the CPI [Communist Party of India]-Janata Dal heartland of Bihar. At each step, he brought up the *mandir* issue and appealed in the name of Ram.

All pretences of a religion-politics divide had been dropped. Advani's car was escorted by a convoy of Bajrang Dal activists on motorcycles. Local leaders hammered away at the Ram issue. In Rosera, where Ram Vilas Paswan is the Janata Dal candidate, state president Tarakant Jha asked people to choose between the *asli* Ram and the *nakli* Ram. "Paswan says that Bhagwan Ram didn't exist," shouts Jha. "I tell you that if Bhagwan Ram didn't exist, then Paswan doesn't exist either."

Advani beams and the crowd loves it. When it is his turn to speak, he makes the somewhat suspect claim that even Muslims back his *mandir* crusade: "A woman jumped on

my jeep in Ayodhya and said, 'What you are doing is right. The Muslims have abandoned the mosque and it doesn't make sense for it to remain there.' I asked her what her name was and she introduced herself as Zia Hashmi.'' At each village, Ms Hashmi finds pride of place in Advani's speeches.

So keen is the BJP on Ram that it throws him into each of its print ads as well. The rather rock and rolly slogan for the campaign is 'Let's go for Ramrajya' and each ad promises Ram, *roti* and *insaaf*. Lest somebody complain to the Election Commission about mixing religion with politics, an asterisk marks a footnote which explains helpfully: ''To liberate all forms of life from fear is my vow. To Indians, Ram is an ideal; a symbol of integrity, justice and compassion.''

It is all rather dodgy stuff and has raised some eyebrows. A.B. Vajpayee has already complained to the press that he is not in favour of ritualism and other leaders are embarrassed by the venomous, communal filth spewed by Sadhvi Rithambara, the foul-mouthed star of the VHP campaign. (Even Advani seems to be a little embarrassed—see interview [not shown].) The trouble is once you blur the divide between politics and religion, it is hard to draw the line.

Will all of it pay off in terms of votes? It probably will. There now seems little doubt that the constant invocation of Ram will do for the BJP what it did for Ramanand Sagar: ensure luck and success. But it is still not clear whether the party's share of the vote will reach the threshold levels necessary for it to translate into seats.

BJP leaders claim they are not worried. Says one of Advani's associates, ''We are treating this as a dress rehearsal for the next election, which we are sure will be held before 1996.'' Certainly, it is no mean achievement for the BJP to have turned the poll into a straight fight with the Congress in many states, even though the Janata Dal is still in the fray. Concedes Rajiv Gandhi: ''The BJP is our main opponent. The JD seems to be collapsing.''

The BJP's reasoning is that even if it does not get much more than 120 seats (or even if it gets exactly the same number as in 1989), it will still have proved a point. So far, whenever it has done well, it has counted on the arithmetic of adjustments or on anti-Congress feeling. For the first time, it is standing on its own and to manage even 88 seats without adjustments will be an impressive achievement.

Once the party can prove to the electorate that it is capable of making a serious bid for power, then it will be ideally placed to win a majority at the next election after this one.

The argument makes some sense, but it ignores the reality of today. If Advani's optimism is partly justified and the BJP is the largest single party in Parliament, it may find that it still can't form a government because nobody will align with it. Thus—unless the BJP gets a majority which is improbable—a vote for the BJP might well end up being a vote for instability in a hung Parliament.

Advani recognises this reality, though he will not acknowledge it. (See interview [not shown].) His attitude is understandable. He staked his political future and that of his party on the Ram revival. Knowing that it was a make-or-break operation. Now, with success so near, he is admitting to no doubts, conceding no objections and leaving it all to Ram.

* Analyst Defines Hindutva

91 IA5100A New Delhi ORGANISER in English 19 May 91 pp 5, 10

[Article by Prafull Goradia: ''Value of Hindutva to Modern India'']

[Text] Despite all its resources and assets, India has not yet come out of the tunnel of decadence. The country has been independent for over 43 years. In these same years, Japan, starting as a shattered nation, has become a world leader. But India continues to hobble from one crisis to another and is getting nowhere. A member of the Third World, it is now ripe for joining the Fourth World if and when such a club of impoverished nations is formed.

There is one central reason for this pathos of India. That is the country has no identity. It has no national personality. It has no mission to live for as a nation. It has no moral spine to stand up with and move forward. As a result, its citizens have only to survive and live for themselves. As a nation, they have no cause to bind them, no beacon to guide them, no goal to go for. As an individual he may have a great deal to his credit. But as an Indian, what is he to be proud of today?

India's finest asset is its Hindutva or its ethos and it has been suppressed by most of its leaders in power as communal. It has been condemned by most of its intellectuals as obscurantist. It has been shunned by most of its politicians as untouchable. In other words, a lot of the Indian elite has done its lot to destroy what is the nation's all-pervading identity and the mainspring of its civilization.

On the American continent, Indians were known as Hindus. If any Indian was Muslim, or Christian he was called a Hindu Muslim or a Hindu Christian. Even today in Spain, all Indians are known as Hindus. But in India it is impolitic to call oneself a Hindu unless one was prepared to be taken as communal and also perhaps anti-Muslim. But it is alright to be described as a Brahmin or a Kayastha or a Jat [farming caste]. This is the extent of the perversion.

In order to appreciate the value of Hindutva to modern India, it would be useful to explore whether a deliberate effort was made to abolish the Hindu ethos. Was there a conspiracy? If so, by and between whom? Or did this

antipathy flow inexorably from the events that preceded Partition? In other words, was it a historical inevitability?

The mainspring of the Partition was the two-nation theory of the Muslim League. The corollary of this theory was if Pakistan for Muslims, India for Hindus. The manner and dispatch with which Hindus were thrown out of Pakistan, it would have been natural for Hindus to react by coming together. The Partition therefore could not cause antipathy towards Hindutva.

To come to deliberate effort, what could have been the motivation? In the days of the freedom struggle, the Congress was deeply committed to Hindu-Muslim unity. The unity did not come about, instead the Partition took place and the Congress accepted it. When four years later, general elections became due, the Congress could hardly make an about-turn on its Hindu-Muslim unity posture. Even if it did, the advantage would go to the Hindu parties. With the death of Sardar Patel and the ouster of P.D. Tandon, the way was clear to go secular, which was a euphemism for abolishing Hindutva, dividing the Hindus on castelines and pampering Muslims.

The Muslim leaders, whether the Mullahs or others, also had an obvious vested interest in dividing the Hindus. To be able to manipulate the Muslim masses and to retain their hold over them, it was eminently expedient for the Mullahs to coalesce with the Congress.

The communists were also a natural associate of this so-called secular coalition. A Hindu vote was necessarily anti-communist and it was best to destroy it before it crystallized. As clients of the Soviet Union, it was the duty of the communists and fellow-travellers to induce the Indian electorate to secure a pro-Soviet government which the Congress was providing. Apart from retaining a large country as a camp-follower, the USSR had a special stake in India as a leader of the so-called nonaligned nations. This movement helped the super-power to mobilize the Third World against the American alliance. The Congress was ready to advance the international interests of the Soviet Union which in turn helped to secure, directly and through the Communist Party of India [CPI], the Congress in power.

There are any number of instances which substantiate the existence of this broad coalition of the Congress, the Muslim leadership, the Soviets and their clients. To name a few, the CPI ensured the survival of the Congress in power between 1969 and 1971 and later even supported the Emergency. The Congress enlisted as active members a number of ex-Muslim Leaguers as well as ex-CPI card holders. The Muslim leaders influenced some ex-Congressmen to split the Janata Party in 1979 on the issue of dual membership of Jana Sangh leaders with RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh] links. In 1987, they induced the Congress to promote the Muslim Women's Bill. In Kerala, the Muslim League has been a perennial ally of either the Congress or the Leftists.

When it ever came to the crunch, nearly all Congressmen, former or current, the leftists and the Muslims have come together to keep out the BJP [Bharatiya Janata party] or the Jana Sangh. Whether in combination or separately, they have all worked systematically to divide the Hindus and destroy Hindutva. It is natural for political parties to oppose one another or to come together on different issues at different times. But it is uncanny that all the parties, all the interests have all the time opposed the BJP. Not merely opposed but treated it as untouchable. Could not this be the result of a conspiracy long forged and continually pursued?

Two legs of the tripod of this conspiracy, namely, the Muslim leaders and the leftists, have their foreign loyalties. The souls of the Mullahs and the Mastans are in Pakistan or Arabia; only their bodies happen to reside in India. The leftists are well-known for their extra-territorial loyalties. The result is an India deprived of its Hindu ethos and bereft of a national identity.

That then is the first great need for Hindutva to modern India. What else can lead India out of the clutches of this conspiracy? India cannot function as a nation unless it is free from the elements which have extra-territorial loyalties. And unless India can function as a free and undivided nation, how can it become vibrant or modern?

Before proceeding to the other reasons for the Hindu ethos being essential to modern India, it would be useful to clarify what Hindutva means in the country's socio-political context. Firstly, as a concept it has nothing to do with the mode of worship which would be the free choice of every citizen. In any case, Hinduism is a way of life and has never been a structured unitary religion. It has no counter-part of a Shahi-Imam, an Aga Khan or an Archbishop.

Secondly, to borrow from political phraseology, as a religion, Hinduism is federal or confederal. All and any sect calls itself Hindu so long as it believes that the divine and the human are integral parts of the same system or the Ultimate Reality. That God is not separate or distinct from Man. Beyond this central belief, each individual is free to follow his own path. In this regard, Hinduism is the ultimate in democracy and openness. It claims no Absolute Truth and only offers an explanation of life. And indicates paths of the search of truth. In the absence of a code or prescription, the Hindu ethos welcomes change with time, a quality so essential for evolving a progressive modern society.

Thirdly, in the context of Hindutva, the question of secular, non-secular or anti-secular does not arise. The universality of its range makes the question redundant. To say a 'secular Hindutva' is a tautology and not a contradiction. India based on Hindutva would not encounter the problem Europe faced with regard to the Church which held down the polity. The word 'secular', which means anti-cleric, has its origin in this European struggle of the state to release itself from the clutches of

the church. It has no relevance in the context of Hindutva, which means an outlook on life and not a prescription for society.

Fourthly, Hindutva is a living reality across most of India. Whether an Indian is a Muslim or Christian, his psyche is ultimately the same as the Hindu's. The environment in which they are brought up is common. The ancestors of most Muslims and Christians in India were Hindu. Any number of Goans claim that they are Brahmin Catholics. It is frequent to come across Muslims who claim they are Rajput. Any number of Khoja women worship Swaminarayan. Many a Parsi custom and ritual is Brahmanical. It is not difficult to come across a Bengali Muslim who would swear the desire for 'mukti' when under pressure. The atmosphere at Ajmer Shareef is more like a Hindu temple than anything Islamic. In sum, the ethos is common. Only the priests or the Mullahs have continuously instigated their followers to be different.

Fifthly, while everyone would be free to worship his own way, Hindutva would insist that all the citizens of India should be supremely loyal to its soil. It cannot tolerate any citizens whose loyalties are extra-territorial. Whose bodies may reside in India but whose souls commute between Pakistan and Arabia or between Moscow and Beijing. Any residents who are not prepared to swear an oath of supreme loyalty to India should be treated as foreigners and not allowed to vote.

Sixthly, while everyone would be free to practise his own sectarian customs, in a court he can get justice under a common law. There cannot be two or more codes of law for the citizen of the one and the same country. Similarly, for the states of the union, there can be no exceptions under the Constitution. All provisions must apply to all the states equally. If all Indians are to be equal, some cannot be treated as more or less equal than others. If any religious and educational institutions are supervised by the State, the law must be common to all communities.

To sum up, Hindutva means that the personality of the Indian State shall reflect the country's ethos and not a combination and permutation manipulated for the convenience of non-patriots, whether Indian or foreign. The essence of Hinduvta is liberty without licence, equality without discrimination, democracy without distortion, openness without dogma.

The question is why has Hindutva been denied its rightful place in India? And why is there so much resistance to its introduction by the BJP? Hindutva has been suppressed for much longer than the post-Independence era. It has been the victim of much older crimes than the conspiracy detailed above. Hindutva has been a casualty for some 800 years.

Since the 13th century, the country has been governed largely by professional rulers, most of whom were alien. When one set of professionals failed, a fresh set of aliens came. When the flow from the Khyber Pass dried up, the Indian Ocean brought the British. With Independence began the Congress era during which an essentially imported or British system has been operated by Indians. The rulers, as we have seen, were influenced by interests with extra-territorial loyalties. In other words, India has not had the benefit of a comprehensively indigenous rule for eight centuries. However benevolent their intentions, professional or alien rulers cannot have native interests as their priority. Hindutva is native and was therefore a casualty of either apathy or antipathy of the rulers.

To return to the value of Hindutva to modern India, it is indispensable to safeguard the integrity of the country. With all the dividing to rule that has gone on for centuries, India would break up without an all-pervading binding link which only Hindutva can provide.

And it is not enough to remain unbroken. Just as it is not enough merely to survive and exist. It is necessary to succeed and flourish. This is as true in the life of a nation as it is in the career of an individual. To succeed, a nation needs a motive force to move and a mission to go forward. And only Hindutva can give them to India.

145 SUNDER NAGAR,

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* Vote in Western Region Between Congress, BJP

* Gujarat: Caste Factor

91AS0991A Madras THE HINDU in English 20 May 91 p 5

[Text] Godhra, May 19—Whether the wave of Hindutva rises high enough to submerge the Kshatriya island of two adjacent constituencies of Kaira and Anand in central Gujarat or it just spends itself on the shores, has become one of the interesting features of Gujarat elections. The inter-caste rivalry between Kshatriyas and Patels, more for economic reasons than social, is making the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] campaigners chant Rama's name forcefully.

Paradoxically, the same caste factors are not so adverse to the BJP in Godhra, not just because its candidate is a Kshatriya but for near-total polarisation of voters on communal lines. Godhra has a gory record of communal violence. It is a prestigious seat for the BJP, where the party has fielded its State president, Mr. Shankersinh Vaghela, who has vacated for the party leader, Mr. L.K. Advani, the Gandhinagar constituency which he represented in the dissolved Lok Sabha.

In Anand, known for its milk cooperative, Amul, the former Chief Minister, Mr. Madhavsinh Solanki has staked his prestige by getting the Congress(I) renomination for his father-in-law, Mr. Ishwarsinh Chavda who had lost to the BJP nominee in November 1989 because of a strong anti-Congress vote. Mr. Solanki had opposed

his party's alliance with the Chief Minister, Mr. Chimanbhai Patel's JD(G) [Janata Dal-Gujarat]. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi overruled him and is likely to consider the merger of both the parties. Under the circumstances, Mr. Solanki and his group have to win Anand to prevent their further marginalisation within the party.

This is not a very difficult job for Mr. Solanki. His backward Kshatriya community is dominating here, constituting 45 percent of the electorate. Besides, 9.1 percent are Muslims, three percent OBC's [Other Backward Castes] and 8.1 percent Scheduled Castes. The former Chief Minister is particularly popular among the backward classes for he had tried to increase the job-reservations for them and had to resign because of anti-reservation agitation that followed. The Kshatriyas dislike the Patels, an affluent community controlling agriculture, agro-based industries and trade. Patels form 27.5 percent of the electorate while Brahmins and Banias are five percent.

Factionalism: Mr. Solanki is now busy going from village to village, to consolidate the Kshatriya vote in support of Mr. Chavda. He is getting good response also from Muslims who abhor the BJP. His task would have been easier, had the factionalism in the Congress(I) not split into his community. A local Kshatriya leader, Mr Dhirsinh Parmar who represents Bhadran Assembly segment of this constituency is against Mr. Chavda.

The BJP knows that it would not be able to get a Patel elected from Anand as in 1989. It's Mr. Rajnibhai Patel, a local leader vice president of the Anand Municipality, is at a tremendous disadvantage in the caste politics. The BJP corrected the position to an extent by nominating Mr. Jharmanbhai Thakor, a Kshatriya for the Mysad Assembly by election now being held simultaneously. This segment is also in Anand and the move is expected to attract some votes from the community. The hope for the BJP is in the division of the Kshatriya vote because of factions in the Congress(I) and the name of Rama. A local monk, Avichaldasji Maharaj, has taken up the challenge. He is going round the Anand constituency in VHP's [Vishwa Hindu Parishad] dharmachakraratha, explaining to the people that their votes will build the temple and under the circumstances voting could be the means of 'kar seva'. He is also appealing for breaking the caste barriers.

Rural, urban divide: The constituency is witnessing another kind of division too, rural and urban, though the disparity of economic development between the two is not much. Towns of Anand, Borsad, Petlad, Bhadran, Sojitra and Cambayare inclined towards the BJP while the villages are leaning towards the Congress(I).

The neighbouring Godhra is one of the most polarised constituencies in the State. If the Muslims are for defeating the BJP, the Hindus are determined to make Mr. Vaghela victorious, defeating former Union Deputy Commerce Minister, Mr. Shantilal Patel, the JD(G) nominee.

In about two years, this is the third time Mr. Patel is contesting from Godhra. He was elected in a by-election in 1988 and was re-elected in the last general elections. Earlier, he was returned to the State Assembly three times from Rajgadh, a segment of the Lok Sabha constituency.

Godhra town had witnessed the worst kind of riots last year. Eight persons of a community were killed in a nearby village. The victims' community retaliated by killing four teachers, including two women, working in its school at Godhra. Mr. Vaghela went on fast in the town to demand appropriate action against the killers.

Now he is being projected as the leader concerned about Godhra, unlike his defending rival who allegedly left the town without visiting the affected areas.

In Kaira, the Kshatriyas who account for 50 percent of votes are very much against the BJP and the party will find it difficult to get support from the Patel (23 percent) for their candidate. Dr. K.D. Jeswani is a non-Patel the opposing candidate is a kshatriya. Mr. Prabhatsinh Chauhan, renominated by the JD(G). Here also it has to depend upon the division of the Kshatriya votes. The JD candidate, Mr. Dhirsinh Chavda, also belongs to that community.

* Rajasthan: Trends Fluctuating

91AS0994B Madras THE HINDU in English 20 May 91 p 7

[Text] Jaipur, May 19—The campaign for the Lok Sabha elections in Rajasthan has been a game of musical chairs with the popularity graph of the main contending parties—the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] and the Congress—fluctuating every fortnight.

Starting as favourites, the Congress(I) went down in the first fortnight after the withdrawals when the BJP with the all-out support of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP] mounted its campaign spreading the spirit of saffron far and wide. Stupefied by the BJP onslaught which assumed the proportion of a minor wave, it took some time for the Congressmen to recover from the impact.

There was no immediate antidote with the Congressmen against the VHP propaganda and the main election plank of the party, "stability" needed more explaining in comparison to the highly emotional issue of "Rama Temple."

Cong(I) regains lost ground: Now as the polling dates draw near it looks that the congress has regained some of its lost ground thanks to the skillful choice of candidates on caste lines in most of the constituencies. Lack of any anti-Congress mood as in 1989, coupled with the absence of a third force like the Janata Dal, which would have been the natural choice of the Muslims in the State is helping the party.

SJP [Samajwadi Janata Party] candidates retire: Initially it looked as if there was going to be multi-cornered or

triangular contests in the State with the Janata Dal and its left allies and the Samajwadi Janata Party jumping into the fray. As the dust settled it became clear that at least in a dozen of the total 25 seats—Jaipur, Dausa, Jalore, Ajmer, Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Ganganagar, Kota, Pali, Bhilwara and Bayana—the contest would be between the BJP and the Congress, for all practical purposes. In half of the remaining seats the contest is expected to narrow down to the two major rivals by the time of polling. The SJP, which had fielded candidates for all the 25 seats, set the trend in retiring its candidates from four places, including Bhilwara.

The BJP and the Congress are contesting all the 25 seats in the State. While the BJP had won 13 seats after contesting 14 in 1989 the Congress had lost all 25 to the joint Opposition alliance. In 1989 the Janata Dal managed to win 11 seats and its left ally, the CPI(M) [Communist Party of India-Marxist], one seat. This time the truncated Janata Dal is fighting 22 seats after leaving Bikaner and Salumber to the CPI(M) and the CPI [Communist Party of India], respectively.

The Samajwadi Janata Party has two candidates, both Union Ministers—Mr. Kalyan Singh Kalvi from Barmer and Mr. Daulatram Saran from Churu—to reckon with in the State. Its third strong candidate, Mr. Tayab Hussain, former Haryana Minister, is from Bharatpur. A leader of Meo Muslims, who account for over a lakh votes in the constituency, Mr. Hussain's presence has become a nightmare for Mr. Natwar Singh, the former External Affairs Minister.

Three top Janata Dal leaders in Rajasthan, the party president, Mr. Sampatram Alwari, the leader of its legislative group, Mr. Nathi Singh (Bharatpur) and its secretary general, Dr. Chandra Bhan (Jhunjhunu) are locked in triangular contests. Another candidate with some winning chances is Mr. Motilal Meena, MLA [member of Legislative Assembly] (Sawai Madhopur) who is also facing three cornered contest. The Muslim candidates fielded by the party such as Mr. J.M. Khan (Nagaur), Mr. Mohammed Mahir Azad (Churu), Mr. Jahoor Hussain (Ajmer) are not to make much impact as the Muslims, determined to ensure the defeat of the BJP, in all probability would opt for their next choice, the Congress(I).

Non-partymen as candidates. The State BJP this time has taken the risk of fielding as many as eight non-partymen—in Churu, Nagaur, Bikaner, Ganganagar, Bharatpur, Barmer, Alwar and Jodhpur—as candidates. Apparent reasons for this are the non-availability of suitable candidates and the compulsions of emerging trends in caste combinations. The party this time has fielded as many as five Jat [farming caste] candidates as the leadership felt it necessary to counter the near total hegemony of the Congress over the Jat leaders following the return of Mr. Nathuram Mirdha, Mr. Vishvendra Singh and Mr. Jagdeep Dhanker to the Congress. Though initially this created resentment among the BJP ranks, slowly the leadership prevailed upon them to accept these candidates.

Among the adopted candidates of the BJP are two Ministers in the State Cabinet belonging to the Janata Dal, Mr. Dungarram Panwar (Ganganagar) and Mr. Ramnarain Vishnoi (Jodhpur) and one JD(D) [Janata Party-Digvijay] MLA, Mrs. Krishnendra Kaur, daughter of the late Raja Man Singh from Bharatpur. However serious differences have cropped up between the BJP and its coalition partner and electoral ally, the Janata Dal(D) with about 10 of its 26 MLAs, including some Ministers, either campaigning for the Janata Dal or the SJP in seats such as Barmer, Nagaur, Udaipur and Tonk. The former working president of the Janata Dal (D), Mr. Manickchand Surana, is supporting the CPI(M) candidate, Mr. Sheopath Singh Makkasar, in Bikaner while three Ministers of the group, Mr. Sampat Singh (Bharatpur), Mr. Jagmal Singh Yadav and Mr. Jagatsingh Dayma (Alwar) are keeping away from campaigning for the BJP nominees.

Heavyweights: The Congress(I) has fielded a large number of heavyweights from the State who include former Union Ministers, Mr. Buta Singh (Jalore), Mr. Natwar Singh (Bharatpur), Mr. Rajesh Pilot (Dausa), Mr. Ramniwas Mirdha (Barmer), Mr. Nathuram Mirdha (Nagaur), Mr. Nawal Kishore Sharma (Jaipur), and Mr. Ashok Gehlot (Jodhpur), two former Chief Ministers, Mr. Shiv Charan Mathur (Bhilwara) and Mr. Jagannath Pahadia (Bayana). The former Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr. Balram Jhakar is seeking election from Sikar constituency. All of them are facing keen contests.

Against three women candidates fielded by the BJP—Mrs. Vasundara Raje (Jhalawar), Mrs. Mahendra Kumari (Alwar) and Mrs. Krishnendra Kaur (Bharatpur), the Congress has fielded only one woman, Dr. Girija Vyas (Udaipur). All the three BJP women candidates, who hail from former princely families have fair chances of winning while the Congress candidate, a philosophy lecturer in Sukhadia University, is locked in a contest with the BJP strongman, Mr. Gulabchand Kataria in Udaipur. The representation of women has come down this time with only 13 women (2.47 percent of the total candidates) contesting from Rajasthan.

Cong(I) better placed in Marwar region: In Marwar region, comprising desert constituencies of Barmer, Nagaur, Jodhpur, Jalore and Pali, the Congress position is better thanks to the wholehearted support of the Jat community.

The elections are being held in two phases in the State. On the first day of polling, May 20, voting will be held in 15 constituencies—Ganganagar, Bikaner, Churu, Jhunjhunu, Sikar, Jaipur, Dausa, Alwar, Bharatpur, Bayana, Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Tonk, Kota and Jhalawar and on the second day, May 23, in the remaining ten seats—Banswara, Salumber, Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara, Pali, Jalore, Barmer, Jodhpur and Nagaur. The first

day's polling involves an electorate of 1.60 crores and on the second day 1.04 crore voters would exercise their franchise. Altogether there are 526 candidates in the fray in the State.

* Madhya Pradesh Campaign Dull

91AS0991C Madras FRONTLINE in English 25 May 91 p 11

[Article by V.T. Joshi in Bhopal; first paragraph is FRONTLINE introduction]

[Text] The BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party], to steer clear of the electoral taboos and possible legal complications, has kept up the fiction that the aggressive pro-Hindu propaganda is the business of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP] and related organisations.

Strange as it may seem, in Madhya Pradesh it is election time without the usual election fever. Cassettes have taken over from leaders, but there are not many listeners. Attendance at street corner meetings is not much to write home about. The enthusiasm of the party workers is not matched by that of the public. Huge cut-outs of leaders embellishing public squares are no longer objects of curiosity. Voter apathy seems writ large. Video vans are moving in the interior of constituencies like the touring cinemas of yore. But what impact they will have on voters is a moot question.

People in places such as Bhopal and nearby areas are waiting for the elusive (film) stars who, various party sources keep claiming, are coming—Sharmila Tagore for husband Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi's campaign, Shabana Azmi, Raj Babbar to promote the electoral prospects of the saffron-clad Swami Agnivesh; Shatrughan Sinha, disillusioned with the Janata Dal, now supporting the BJP. Many suspect that the names are mentioned by the parties for their propaganda value rather than to indicate their consent or firm schedules. With 10 days to go for polling the electoral scene was yet to transform itself dramatically to enthuse voters.

BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee, who is himself contesting from two constituencies—Vidisha and Lucknow—sees the BJP wave wherever he goes, especially in western Madhya Pradesh [M.P.]. (It was somewhat astounding that a leader of Vajpayee's eminence should allow himself to be weighed against coins, in Vidisha. Compulsions of electoral popularity, obviously.)

Not to be outdone, Congressmen point to the massive crowds waiting for the "Prime Minister-in-waiting," Rajiv Gandhi, for hours on end in the blazing sun in parts of eastern Madhya Pradesh, particularly in Jabalpur and nearby areas. Rajivji jeetega is the burden of the songs and lyrics in a 60-minute audio cassette released by the Congress candidate in Bhopal, Pataudi.

The Janata Dal, with its Left allies, has brought in a drama troupe from Delhi to stage street plays whose themes are condemnation of the rich and uplift of the poor, to emphasise the promise of social equity.

The BJP, on its part, launched its cassette campaigns long before the others. Obviously to steer clear of the electoral taboos and possible legal complications, the party has kept up the fiction that the aggressive pro-Hindu propaganda is the business of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and related organisations, and that the BJP itself has nothing to do with it. BJP spokesmen explain that as a matter of policy it would not associate itself with the VHP and others in its campaign and that it would not invite the VHP leaders or sadhus to any BJP platform.

This policy was seen in action recently when the VHP organised two huge meetings "on its own." The star performer was its powerful orator, young Sadhvi Ritambhara. Dressed in saffron robes, she held the massive audience spell-bound for almost an hour with her inimitable, aggressive style. She virtually spoke poetry and accused Muslims of keeping themselves "away from the national mainstream." Her message to Hindus was loud and clear—unite. And she did so deceptively and deftly, without even once mentioning either the BJP or the elections. But the underlying message was unmistakable.

In the present electoral arena—apart from top-notchers such as Vajpayee—the only other prominent candidate is the Janata Dal's Swami Agnivesh who is a match for others in making moving public speeches. Comparatively weak in electoral support, he has adopted the technique of posing inconvenient questions to his rivals, particularly the Congress nominee, Pataudi, for forgetting about the welfare of the people of Bhopal and "now suddenly remembering them to seek their votes." Agnivesh tells his audience with telling effect that the Pakistani cricketer, Imran Khan, is raising Rs.[rupees] 16 crores through charity matches to set up a cancer hospital in Pakistan. In contrast, the Indian cricket personality has not raised even Rs. 16 for the hapless Bhopal gas victims, let alone offer a "few feet" of his vast lands for burying the dead after the gas tragedy, Agnivesh asserts amidst jeers from his sizable crowd of listeners. He is equally devastating in his condemnation of the BJP for "spreading the poisonous gas of communal hatred in the country, several times more lethal than the Union Carbide MIC gas which killed and maimed thousands in Bhopal."

Neither the Congress nor the BJP answers Swami's charges but they hold forth on the larger national issues of "stability," "national integrity," et al.

There are posters, banners and graffiti galore on walls, but usually it is all very dull. No catchy slogans or attractive phrases, and at times they are more abusive than good-humoured. If the Congress slogans focus on "Rajiv on the comeback trail," Chandra Shekhar is hailed as the "philosopher king" by his supporters while the BJP harps on "Rama rajya."

Ironically, two cassettes of rival parties seem to be recorded in the same voice—the voice of a local artist.

The law and order situation in M.P. is fairly satisfactory and the State does not figure in the Election Commission's list of "sensitive States."

• Gujarat: BJP Ahead

91AS0991D Madras FRONTLINE in English 25 May 91 p 32

[Article by Manoj Joshi: "The 'Default Wave'"; quotation marks as published]

[Text] Things are going the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] way in the most urbanised and business-oriented State of India, Gujarat. The Congress, many of the founding leaders of which hailed from this State, seems to be in hopeless decline resulting in a "default wave" for the BJP. For its part the latter has worked assiduously and intelligently to entrench itself in the State and the payoffs are visible in the effective and organised campaign it has unleashed. Amarbhai Zarivala, senior party leader, told FRONTLINE his party would secure 18 seats. As for the daunting caste equations, he declared it with a myth and the BJP would prove it so.

A political observer said the Congress(I) was a house in disorder. In 1989 it secured only 33 out of 182 seats as against 145 in the earlier Assembly. It was clear this defeat called for introspection in the High Command. In the wilderness it was expected that time would reconstitute the formidable 'KHAM' (Kshatriya-Harjan-Adivasi-Muslim) alliance but that did not happen. The party is paying the price.

Besides a 'kink' towards communalist attitudes resulting in severe rioting in 1969, 1985 and 1989, Gujarat is afflicted by casteism. The most powerful group is the Patels, and the saying goes that "Patelism is stronger than communalism." There are some 52 percent other backward classes (called the Bakshi-Panch castes after the commission headed by Bakshi). However, the backlash provoked by Madhavsinh Solanki's attempt to provide reservations for them in 1981 has made it difficult to reconstitute the platform under the Mandal banner.

Muslim votes are important in the Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Baroda, Broach, Godhra, Surat, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha constituencies. The history of communal disturbances makes the question of their voting preference important. The slick BJP campaign has not quite given up even on the Muslims. It is bringing in its national "star," former Union Minister Sikandar Bakht, and it also has a few Muslim corporators plugging its version of "secularism." According to reports, former actress Parveen Babi, a Gujarati Muslim, too toured certain areas campaigning for the BJP.

However, the big dilemma is with regard to the Janata Dal and the Congress(I). The word is that while Muslim hearts are with V.P. Singh, their pragmatic head tells them to vote Congress which at least has a chance of rolling back the BJP tide. Chiman Patel is also appealing to Muslims to vote for the Janata Dal(Gujarat), citing his Government's record in protecting the minorities.

Observers in Ahmedabad say the interesting fights are those between BJP supremo L.K. Advani and G.I. Patel in Gandhinagar. A recent Advani rally was a huge success there. But Patel is counting on "Patelism" and the Muslim vote. Advani's win is by no means certain at this stage. Another interesting contest is between the television 'Sita' representing the BJP and the Congress' R.P. Gaekwad. There are murmurs against 'Sita' within the BJP, but recently her campaign got a boost from the visit of "Sadhvi" Ritambhara who drew a crowd of 1.5 lakhs at her meeting, the biggest so far. But the Congress has a good chance of capturing Baroda especially if the Muslims pitch in.

Chiman Patel is matching the BJP's vast use of resources in running his wife Urmilaben Patel's campaign from Jamnagar. Discredited as a politician, he has also been consorting with known criminals. Some say his current reign has brought Gujarat to as yet unplumbed depths of corruption.

In Ahmedabad, Aysha Begum Shaikh is the Janata Dal nominee. She is the wife of Maj. Shaikh, posthumously awarded a Vir Chakra for gallantry in the 1965 operations against Pakistan. But that is not her claim to fame. She is a social worker and politician in her own right, having twice been an MLA [member of Legislative Assembly] and a Minister. She said she is receiving a substantial amount of trade union support and in her office a union activist, Nainaben Bhatt, proudly declared that all the poor workers would support Aysha Begum because 'bread, and not temple was *their* issue.'

A fortnight before the polling date of May 26, it seemed the BJP may get 16 seats with its tally going up to 20 should the Congress ennui persist. The Janata Dal may get the Bhavnagar and Patan seats. Rajmohan Gandhi (Janata Dal), who is campaigning actively without resources, may yet pull off a miracle in Sabarkantha. The Janata Dal (G) may manage with money and muscle power to wrest Porbandar and Jamnagar. Observers are still willing to give the Congress a chance to get eight to ten seats since they argue that the campaign will really get going after May 15. In Gujarat as in other parts of the country, waiting for the Congress to get going is like 'Waiting for Godot'. But what if Godot does not come?

• Rajasthan: Vote Unsure

91AS0991E Madras FRONTLINE in English 25 May 91 p 33

[Article by Sunny Sebastian: "Rajasthan Imponderables"]

[Excerpt] As the campaign moved into top gear in Rajasthan, political parties, despite their tall claims, were at a loss to gauge the mood of the electorate.

Certainly a lot of imponderables had crept into the scene since the announcement of elections, which made it difficult for the four main parties in the fray to rely on any particular vote bank, caste-wise or religion-wise.

Starting as the favourites initially, the Congress, trying to recapture at least 25 Lok Sabha seats, is not exactly brimming with confidence. One reason is the uncertainty over the impact of the Rama mandir issue, especially among villagers and women. Then there is the swing of caste votes in triangular and multi-cornered contests.

It has become clear that the manoeuvres of the central leadership to bring to the party Nathuram Mirdha and Maharana Mahendra Singh of Mewar from the Janata Dal and the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] respectively, will not exactly provide a windfall for the Congress as expected though it may help garner support from Jats and Rajputs. The BJP leadership counters the Maharana in the Mewar region with a vociferous campaign almost bordering on vilification while in Marwar, the abode of the Mirdhas, it has fielded Jat candidates, even from outside the party, to contain the impact.

In fact the BJP is engaged in a gamble which may make or break its fortunes in the State. If it fails the natural corollory will be the fall of the State Government and the decline of Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. But if it succeeds, the party will match the Congress in the State.

The BJP's game plan is to win as many seats as possible while retaining the 13 it held in the dissolved Lok Sabha. It has fielded as many as eight non-partymen, in Churu, Nagaur, Bikaner, Ganganagar, Bharatpur, Barmer, Alwar and Jodhpur. Among them are five Jats [farming caste], who had so far stayed away from the BJP in Rajasthan. In Jodhpur, from where the BJP's Jaswant Singh won in 1989, the party candidate is Ramnaran Vishnoi, a Minister in the State Cabinet who belonged to the Janata Dal (Digvijay) group. All the remaining seats—except Alwar from where Mahendra Kumari, wife of the former ruler of Alwar, is contesting—from where Jats have been fielded, are dominated by the community.

The BJP is faced with the uncertainty in the stand of the MLAs [members of Legislative Assembly] belonging to the Janata Dal (Digvijay), its coalition partner in the State. Despite the fact that the BJP has "adopted" two of its Ministers, in Jodhpur and Ganganagar, and one MLA, Krishnendra Kaur, daughter of the late Raja Man Singh of Deeg in Bharatpur to fight on the 'Lotus' symbol, about a dozen Janata Dal (Digvijay) MLAs are either supporting the Janata Dal or the SJP [Samajwadi Janata Party] or simply playing truant. [passage omitted]

* BJP Still Surging in Uttar Pradesh

91UP0025Z A New Delhi JANSATTA in Hindi 9 May 91 p 1

[Article by Kumar Anand: "Not Just a Breeze, But a Forceful BJP One"]

[Excerpts] BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] is now in such a favorable position in U.P. [Uttar Pradesh] that had Congress (I) been in such a position, the papers would have had daily glowing reports of "a Congress breeze through in U.P." This is according to Lal Krishnan Advani who recently spoke with reporters on a flight from Delhi to Dehra Doon and discussed his impressions while traveling through a dozen or so parliamentary districts in U.P.

Having spoken of the BJP wave flowing through U.P., Mr. Advani regarded himself as capable of being a neutral analyst in this respect. The situation in regard to the Lok Sabha constituencies is quite clear. The politics of Ram [politics with a religious message] has turned the situation upside down. Leaders now listen to discourses by sadhus [Hindu religious figures] and sadhus come to listen to the discourses of political leaders. As Advani descended at Dehra Doon's Jollygrant airport on Monday at 0845, it was indeed sadhus who greeted him with garlands. Just a few days before, Rajiv Gandhi had come to Haridwar to worship, in hopes of furthering his party's success. But in Rishikesh, even without any puja [worship], sadhus and other religious figures came forward to bestow their blessings on the BJP. The blessing was for the BJP to be able to form their government in the highest parliament in the land so that Ram Rajya [politics of honor with a spiritual basis], could proceed. Swamis Ishwaranand Bharati, Jitendra Bharati, Krishnachari Brahmachari, V. Saraswati, Hamsadas Nirakari, Chigyanand, and others signed their names to this blessing.

It is important to note the youth involved with the BJP. Wherever Advani went, hundreds of youth on scooters and motorcycles were there to receive him. From Jollygrant airport up to Hardos, they followed him. It took the form of an expanding procession. From roofs, balconies, footpaths, and stores, people merrily greeted Advani. The program had become delayed because of the huge crowd that had come to greet him. It took two hours to traverse 25 km.

Everywhere Advani was showered with flowers. [passages omitted further detailing Advani's travel through 12 districts] It is worth noting that these 12 districts have been exclusively dominated by Congress (I) even during the V.P. [Singh] wave of 1989. The Janata Dal is shrinking there and BJP is the principal opponent of Congress (I). [passages omitted detailing past election results]

Everywhere he goes, Advani draws a bigger crowd than the top leaders of the opposing parties. Rajiv Gandhi had come to Dehra Doon on 3 May. The crowd greeting Advani was at least twice as big. When Rajiv went to Rishikesh, 2,000 to 2,500 listeners showed up. The next day, when Advani came, at least 5,000 came. Chandra Shekhar had also failed to draw a large crowd there on behalf of Maneka Gandhi. [passages omitted making crowd size comparisons in other locations]

Agreeable to the expanding BJP wave, local leaders and candidates without party affiliation have come forward. [passage omitted giving examples of independent and opposing party leaders showing sympathy toward BJP]

This is happening in the Congress' fortress. When a couple of Janata Dal candidates won there in the last elections, they promptly resigned. Yet BJP may win 10 of these 12 districts. It is clear that BJP has climbed onto the politics of the mountain districts of U.P.. They are standing strong in the foothills. As far as the Vidhan Sabha [state assembly] election is concerned, BJP's position is even stronger. It is their turn to form the U.P. government.

* BJP Impact in Kerala Seen Increasing

91AS1005E Calcutta THE STATESMAN in English 15 May 91 pp 5, 7

[Article by Amulya Ganguli]

[Text] Thiruvananthapuram, May 15—Apart from the uncertainty about the Muslim vote, the other imponderable in Kerala's election scene relates to the BJP's [Bharatiya janta Party] role. Although the State is known to be almost equally divided in its political preference between the ruling Left Democratic Front [LDF] and the Congress(I)-led United Democratic Front [UDF], with the BJP generally securing no more than seven percent of the votes, it may seem surprising at first sight that this minuscule party should be so much in the news.

But the reason for its disproportionate importance lies not only in the BJP's recent strident postures at the national level, but also in the curious balancing role it plays in quite a few constituencies. According to the BJP's own estimates, the party secures between 5,000 and 6,000 votes in almost every constituency, thereby putting it in a position to play a crucial part in the marginal seats. A BJP spokesman claimed that in the last Assembly election, the UDF lost 29 seats and the LDF 23 seats because of the BJP votes.

What is important to note in this context is not only the disruptive role the BJP can play without any direct gain for itself, but the calculated manner in which it plays the game to score a political point. Being a party of "committed" voters, as the spokesman said, it can use this limited, but fairly effective, strength to strike at its perceived enemy. The BJP is all set to do this again, but the difference from earlier occasions when it chipped in for the UDF on the basis of a "secret understanding," as the CPI(M) [Communist Party of India-Marxist] alleges, is that the BJP's strange proximity to the Indian Union Muslim League as a result will be more noticeable than before because of the surcharged communal atmosphere in the country, though not in Kerala. All those who are said to be involved deny, though, that any deal has been struck, with the BJP maintaining that such indirect links are out of the question because they will "affect our all-India position." The Congress(I)'s Mr A.K. Antony said that the LDF has cooked up the charges because there was no Bofors this time. Moreover, he said that the CPI(M) could hardly afford to adopt a holier than thou attitude in this respect because it had been the BJP's partner since the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal days of 1967 and, if need be, will be so again since the Congress(I) is the Left's main enemy in Kerala.

Mr Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait made the same point while refuting the charge of the Muslim League's indirect ties with the BJP via the UDF by accusing the CPI(M) and the Janata Dal of giving credibility to the "fascist, communal" BJP in the 1989 elections and helping it to increase it strength in Parliament. But if the BJP remains something of an obsession, even as an object of curiosity, it is because, as elsewhere in the country, it has begun to make its presence felt in Kerala with its distinctive brand of politics. Few expect it to make any significant gains in the polls, with Mr Antony believing that "it will affect both of us" (UDF and LDF) and be "neutralized" in the process. But if the BJP nevertheless comes into various calculations, it is because the difference between the two main fronts is a matter of a mere 100,000 votes.

But more than the BJP's electoral impact, what is noteworthy is the distinct possibility that its politics may become respectable after a time. True, it is still commonly branded as a communal outfit which has no place in Kerala's closely integrated society with its long-established communal ties based on an appreciation of various cultures and lifestyles, but a meeting with the writer, Mrs Kamala Das, was a pointer to what some prominent members of society may be thinking. Although she said that by giving up her hour of puja, she had lost nothing and gained the time for writing a story or taking a walk or giving the dog a bath, and expressed the view that a child should not be taught any religious beliefs and be allowed to choose his own faith after 18 as he chose his diet or clothes or a partner for life, some of her views would gladden any rathayatri or kar sevak.

Speaking of a seminar on secularism which she attended, she said "they were attacking Hindus" although there were only 3,000 Hindu schools in India compared with 36,000 madrassas. According to her, many people "who profess to belong to the Congress will vote for the BJP secretly." Perhaps this was a reaction to what happened during the Gulf war which, she said, was portrayed as a war between believers in Islam and non-believers. "If that is the kind of war cry, then Pakistan will attack us." Admitting that the Marxists in Kerala were "less corrupt," she repeated what is heard so often nowadays: "Marxism has gone out everywhere except here. This is their last fortress... If E.M.S. [identity unknown] dies, Marxism will also die... The future belongs to the BJP if India is to have a future."

Apart from the fact that the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh] has always had pockets of influence in Kerala, the BJP's growth has been ascribed, first, to the Nilakkal agitation of the early eighties and, secondly, as a reaction to the increase in the Muslim League's clout during the UDF regime. The Nilakkal agitation had an

uncanny similarity to the Ayodhya issue, for it began with the "discovery" of a cross in the grounds of a temple which led to the demand for building a church on the spot. According to a BJP spokesman, about 60 Hindu organizations opposed the demand, with the result that the cross was removed and the State Government gave a plot of land for building the church. "We sat together the bishops and us," the BJP spokesman said, "and cordially discussed the issue. There was no confrontation. The same thing could be done in Ayodhya."

According to a CPI(M) spokesman, Mr Karunakaran's "cohabitation" with the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress during his days in power was said to have made these parties so assertive as to trigger a Hindu backlash, although it has to be recalled that the creation of the Muslim-majority Malappuram district was Mr Namboodiripad's contribution as Chief Minister in the sixties to the growth of the Muslim League, a policy from which the CPI(M) broke away only in 1987 after "bitter inner-party struggles" which led to a small section to leave the party. Moreover, since the CPI(M) was also passing through a militant phase in Mr Karunakaran's time, the BJP also emerged as the only organized force which could stand up not only to the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress but counter the CPI(M) as well.

At the moment, however, when the BJP can be said to have finally emerged as a party in its own right which does not have to push forward organizations like the Hindu Munnani to the front as in the 1984 elections, it is seemingly preparing to play a less marginal role than at present. But to be more effective in that respect, it has started projecting, as elsewhere in the country, those of its members who are not Hindus. One of them is Dr Raichel Matthai, who claimed that "inside BJP, there is no difference between Christian, Muslim and Hindu. We are a party of humans, not exclusively for Hindus."

She believes that more people will join the party once it came to power, for then "we can give jobs." At the moment, it did not have "much to offer, being not a Government." As a member of the BJP national executive, she had "never felt out of place" in the party, but a faint echo of the nagging doubt that the choice she, a Christian, had made in joining the BJP was something out of the ordinary was evident from her remark that "lots of people used to think that I'm doing something negative, but now the attitude has changed."

It is not impossible, however, that such doubts will reappear because of the dismay felt by the Christians over the BJP's intention to do away with Article 30 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right of the minorities to establish their own educational institutions. Questioned on this point, Dr Matthai said that Article 30 "will be changed without any difficulty for any community." According to her, the BJP has not "divulged how it will be changed." A committee will decide that but, in any event, it is a case of evolution; what is suitable today may not be so 10 to 20 years hence. So Article 30 will be reviewed to suit the situation and not to hinder anybody's progress."

The CPI(M) is, of course, elated over this development, for there is a definite possibility that, in addition to the Muslims, some of the Christians, who had earlier been vehemently opposed to the atheistic Communists, would turn to the LDF this time. According to a CPI(M) worker, such a turn of events will provide his party with a "golden opportunity" to undermine the position of the rival front. To some extent, it may have already done so by another means, which was to utilize the State's highly successful literacy campaign to send its cadres and supporters to almost every village.

Of all the parties, the Muslim League is naturally the most perturbed about the BJP although, ironically, it is in indirect alliance with its sworn enemy via the UDF because of the iron law of Kerala politics where a party has to be with one of the two fronts in order to survive. However, like most others including Dr K.N. Raj, a former Delhi University Vice-Chancellor, who believes that the BJP "won't get very far," Mr Sulaiman Sait also maintained that the BJP had no future in a State with a cent percent [as published] literacy rate and high political consciousness. Besides he said "all our right-thinking crores and crores of Hindu brothers do not want riots and lawlessness. Wasn't the BJP isolated in the National Integration Council and during discussions in Parliament?"

The political situation apart, what impresses a visitor to Kerala, "one of the most tranquil places in India," in Dr Raj's words, is the absence of the kind of rowdyism and intimidation that has come to be associated with elections in other parts of the country. After reading about the feverish preparations that are being made to distort the election process in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, a visit to Kerala can make one feel that there is hope yet for Indian democracy.

* Congress(I) Prospects Seen Uncertain

91P40289A Calcutta ANANDA BAZAR PATRIKA in Bengali 8 May 91 p 4

[Article by Sharmila Basu: "Will Voters Break Their Tradition of Allegiance to Congress?"]

[Excerpts] While conducting door-to-door campaigning in Kanpur, CPM [Communist Party of India-Marxist] workers heard a familiar refrain: "Yea, the country's situation is really bad but we always vote for Congress." Though a propensity toward anti-Congress sentiment has been present since independence, voters retain their allegiance toward Congress when the booths open. Voters do not easily switch. Congress traditionally wins by splitting the anti-Congress vote.

Many regard Indians' propensity to vote the same way for decades as an example of a society unwilling to change. Writer V.S. Naipaul, who is originally Indian

[Trinidadian], upon first seeing India exclaimed, "India has no history, it never changes." [passages omitted recounting historical events]

Does Congress actually recieve votes of allegiance? This theory is not accepted by CPM leaders. According to CPM leader Ashok Mitra, Congress' traditional votes are slipping away. He feels that younger voters lack a sentimental attachment to the party. Exit polls from the 1989 elections revealed that voters over 50 were most inclined toward Congress (I) while those in the age group of 18 to 30 were the least inclined to give their votes to the party. Younger voters were more inclined toward the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] and the Janata Dal. CPM also had support among the youth.

The question of voter participation of the voters claiming allegiance is an important one. Participation in the voting process varies from election to election. From this perspective, even if Congress (I) has a vote bank of 43 percent, the question is how many go to the booths. The results are uneven.

In the opinion of Election Commissioner Pranoy Roy, India's voters are fickle in comparison to those of other countries. He pointed out the 'vote swings' of previous elections. However, despite the talk of a voting 'breeze' occurring during the election, the numbers do not support it. The percentages of votes cast for a particular party has hardly varied more than 3 percentage points. [passages omitted giving past election results, contrasting them with those of the United Kingdom]

Many regard the vote in 1989 as having been a united anti-Congress effort. This was true from the perspective of party leaders interested in unseating Congress (I). However, this was not as important to the actual voters. This time, issues are important in the election. The Janata Dal is attracting the Muslim votes, while the BJP is attracting Hindu voters, particularly those of the higher caste. Congress (I) may be in trouble despite the lack of a united anti-Congress front. The voters are not responding to the call of Congress this time, at least not yet. The party with the greatest number of committed voters during this summer election will come out ahead. Currently, Congress (I) voters seem apathetic.

* Congress(I), JD(G) Alliance Shaken

91AS1005F Madras THE HINDU in English 25 May 91 p 10

[Text] Ahmedabad, May 23—The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi has created fresh doubts about the utility of the poll alliance between the Congress(I) and the Janata Dal (Gujarat). It was essentially the accord between Mr. Gandhi and the Chief Minister, Mr. Chimanbhai Patel, and it would not have perhaps materialised, had it been left to the JD(G) and the GPCC(I) [as published].

The group led by former Chief Minister, Mr. Madhvsinh Solanki, had opposed it pleading that for the party to win, the anti-Congress votes should not be allowed to go to the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] en bloc and they should be divided between the BJP and the JD(G). Mr. Gandhi had not only overruled the objection but allowed the regional party ten seats to contest, almost double than what the Congress(I) was expected to leave for its junior partner.

Mr. Gandhi could have bargained for more seats than the 16 he got since the fate of Mr. Patel's Government depended on the continued support of 32 MLAs [members of Legislative Assembly] of the Congress(I). This gave rise to the speculation that the poll-pact and the resultant launching of the Janata Dal(G) by the Chief Minister, paved the way for his entry into the Congress(I).

Dissidence: This possibly was the latent fear of the Madhavsinh group. All those who opposed the alliance then accepted it because of the stature of Mr. Gandhi but they were active against most of the JD(G) and some of the Congress(I) candidates to prove the futility of the strategy. Mr. Gandhi received scores of complaints about the covert activities of anti-alliance Congressmen during his visit when he came here to campaign.

A perturbed Congress(I) president left behind general secretary, Mr. R.L. Bhatia to do firefighting. Now nobody here expects to the new leader to revoke the pact but most of the JD(G) leaders are convinced that the new leader may not be able to contain the dissidence within the Congress(I) ranks the way Mr. Gandhi could. On the contrary, they are apprehensive that the group would become bolder than before.

In Gujarat, the Congress(I) is considered to be a weak party which had to take the support of Mr. Patel to contest the election. Mr. Gandhi's personal popularity in the State is not what his mother enjoyed or what he himself had in South India. This is indicated by the wild mass reaction to the assassination. Hence the Congress(I) cannot expect a powerful sympathy wave in Gurajat, the kind witnessed after the death of Indira Gandhi.

With the demise of its established one-man leadership, the Congress(I) loses its stability plank. It will be some time before the new leader establishes his/her rapport with the people of the State and by then the BJP would have reinforced the status of Mr. L.K. Advani who is also contesting from Gandhinagar in Gujarat.

Move for unity: Perturbed by all these factors, some leaders of the JD(G) have initiated a move to bring all ex-Congress members together to fight the BJP jointly, to save both, the government and the elections. But for that, most of them have a long way to go unless such an understanding emerges at the national level.

The BJP expects that by June 15, the new polling date, the summer heat would come down and the wedding season will be over, raising the voters' turn-out and that will help the party. All parties have suspended their campaigns for a week as a mark of respect to the slain

leader but also to get time to reshape their propaganda plans, incorporating the new factors.

* No 'Wave' Seen Emerging for Congress(I)

91AS1005C Calcutta THE STATESMAN in English 15 May 91 p 7

[Article by D.P. Kumar]

[Text] New Delhi, May 14—With less than a week to go before the elections, there is still no "wave" in the vast countryside in northern India in favour of the Congress(I) that would help the party win a majority and recapture the seat of power.

It has been generally believed all this while, particularly since the campaigning began three weeks ago, that towards the end of it and before the polling date, an upsurge of public opinion, otherwise called a "wave," would be in evidence in response to the Congress(I) leader, Mr Rajiv Gandhi's call for a stable Government at the Centre.

But no such "wave" has as yet been in sight in the capital or reported from the States where campaigning is in full swing and popular opinion is crystallizing for the final day of reckoning.

Evidently, the "stability" slogan has not worked, at least so far, to make an impact on the minds of the voters. For the slogan to succeed in its aims, the Congress(I) must get more than 255 seats in the Lok Sabha out of the 510 for which elections are being held.

To go by the atmosphere of confidence in evidence in the Congress(I) headquarters at 24 Akbar Road here, the party is romping home with more than 300 seats in its pocket and rule for the next five years forgetting the nightmare of the Janata Dal regime. But impartial assessments made by politicians and pollsters show that the party is not going to make much advance on what its strength was in the outgoing Lok Sabha.

To go by the party's well-wishers, it could go up to 220 if it did very well both in the North and the South, which means that the Congress(I) would secure at least 24 out of the 42 seats in Andhra Pradesh, the same number out of 39 in Tamil Nadu, 6 out of 8 in Karnataka, 17 out of 26 in Orissa, 10 out of 42 in West Bengal, 25 to 30 each in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh [U.P.], 4 out of 7 in Delhi, 5 out of 10 in Haryana, 20 out of 40 in Madhya Pradesh, 30 out of 48 in Maharashtra, 3 out of 4 in Himachal Pradesh, 12 out of 26 in Gujarat and 8 out of 19 in the north-eastern States.

But impartial observers do not foresee the Congress(I) faring so well. Even if it does, it would need a solid addition to the total—which will not be forthcoming from the AIADMK [All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam], its ally, for it is contesting only 11 seats to the Lok Sabha.

The "stability" theory has obviously not worked well. Mr Gandhi's principal contestant, Mr V.P. Singh, is making a mockery of it at all his election meetings. He says: "Mr Gandhi's concept of 'stability' has been knocked down already by just two constables." In wry humour, Mr Singh explains that "the Chandra Shekhar Government's stability was finished in four months after Mr Gandhi complained that two Haryana constables were spying on him."

He gives instances of the number of times Mr Gandhi "has reshuffled the members of his ministerial council or their portfolios, imposed President's rule on Congress(I)-run States or arbitrarily changed his chief Ministers, himself causing the greatest instability to his own regime."

As for Mr V.P. Singh, he has forged a powerful combination of parties and is poised to secure a large number of seats. Theoretically at least, he could score a near-majority, but it remains to be seen if his Janata Dal can pull it off. The National Front-Left Front [NF-LF] combination has great potential. The Janata Dal is itself a part of the National Front which is also composed of the two regional parties, Telugu Desam [TDP] and the DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam]. The two regional parties had very little representation in the outgoing Lok Sabha. The TDP had only two members and the DMK had none. But this time both parties may get a good number of seats. Assuming that its achievements will be moderate, or about half of the 42 seats, the TDP will even then secure 20 seats. The DMK, even on the Congress(I) admission, might secure one-third of the 39 seats, and together they would be around 33.

The Left Front this time appears set to win about 65 seats, against 54 that it had in the outgoing Lok Sabha. The Front will make considerable gains in Kerala.

To these are to be added what the Janata Dal itself can bag. On a liberal estimate, the party may secure some 30 to 35 sets in Bihar, around the same figure in Uttar Pradesh, 15 in Orissa, 10 each in Karnataka and Maharashtra, 4 each in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana, two each in Delhi and Tamil Nadu and one each in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. These add up roughly to 120, and with the scores of the regional parties and of the Left Front, the N.F.-L.F. too may come up to nearabout the Congress(I)'s total—the assumptions of impartial observers coming out correctly.

The BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] leadership claims that a "wind" is blowing in its favour in U.P. and other places. The leadership does not say the party is going to secure a majority, but claims that the vote for the BJP will be "positive."

BJP leaders say the party will sweep the polls in U.P. and Bihar. The political forces are so arrayed that it is not the Congress(I) which would derive the advantage in a triangular or quadrangular contest.

In the prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty, it is difficult to guess what the BJP's score will be. Impartial observers, however, think that the party will win around 100 seats. If it can take its strength to 125 or so, the BJP will be a force to contend with in Indian politics.

* Congress(I) Said Uninterested in Solutions

91AS0765B New Delhi JANSATTA in Hindi 14 Mar 91 p 6

[Article by Rajniraman Jha: "The Fall of the Government Unmasked the Congress [I]"]

[Text] The Chandra Shekhar government had no alternative but to go. There is no wonder that this government fell. Chandra Shekhar must be feeling good after leaving the office of the prime minister. The complicated web that the Congress (I) had woven around him was not something that he wanted to stay in. His resignation shows his farsightedness.

Chandra Shekhar's four months in the office are not enough for making any kind of assumptions. What more could one do in four months! However, these four months have unmasked the Congress [I] Party. These months have showed us that trusting the Congress [I] would be self-destructive. Rajiv Gandhi's declaration on the Doordarshan that Chandra Shekhar did not trust him ridicules the word "trust" since Chandra Shekhar had trusted the Congress [I] when he had formed his government.

It is difficult to understand what exactly did the Congress [I] Party want from Chandra Shekhar. Assam and Tamil Nadu governments were dismissed. Fuel supply to U.S. planes was stopped. Rajiv Gandhi was deputed as a peace ambassador to Gulf countries and the Soviet Union. Announcements were made to have the surveillance of Rajiv Gandhi investigated. What more did they want? Was Chandra Shekhar the prime minister of the nation or an orderly employed by the Congress [I] Party?

Although the Congress [I] Party did not withdraw its endorsement of Chandra Shekhar, its action (walkout of the Lok Sabha) is more insulting than withdrawing its endorsement. The simple interpretation of this action could be that while the Congress [I] did not want to be associated with the government, it also wanted to reap full benefits of its endorsement. This double standard was being practiced by ignoring the nation and the nation did not gain anything positive from it.

There were some logical reasons behind the Rashtariya Morcha [National Front] withdrawal from endorsement of the government. That government had failed in controlling important issues such as inflation, corruption, Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir, and [illegible word]. It had started, in frustration, to push the issue of the caste system under using the pretext of quota reservation. There was no good or logical reason for endorsing that government. The BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] was able to keep its head up even after withdrawing its support. However, the boycott of the Lok Sabha session by the Congress [I] Party is beyond our comprehension. This action was equivalent to withdrawing support. There was no point for dissension and no action was taken to embarrass the Congress [I]. There was no room for any friction. We have to admit that it was the hidden desire of the Congress [I] to be in control that led to the fall of the [Chandra Shekhar] government. Chandra Shekhar had to become the sacrificial goat.

The truth is that the Congress [I] has been greatly hurt by its own activities. A major question is looming in front of the people. What would happen if the Congress [I] returns to power again? It is clear that the Congress [I] party is not serious about the problems our nation is facing. If it was serious, then it would have let Chandra Shekhar do his work at least once during the last four months. Chandra Shekhar had given hints of the commitment of his governmentd by taking some important steps. The Congress [I] party's lack of support for Chandra Shekhar clearly indicated that it did not want to solve the problems. If the people believe that Congress [I] is sincere, they will elect it to the government again.

If we compare the BJP withdrawal of support of the National Front government with this incident, we will notice a distinct difference. The BJP had withdrawn their support over a disagreement which did not involve any question of morality. Chandra Shekhar, however, showed his eagerness to solve the problem and remove the cause of disagreement. The people understand this, and the Congress [I] should know it. Chandra Shekhar and his associates do not have to be sorry. He had only limited options. He had nothing to lose, either. The situation in which he had formed the government required a lot of courage, patience, and commitment. Forming a government with only 54 (62 at that time) was a very risky task. Call it suicidal or a courageous stand; the task that Chandra Shekhar took was considered necessary for that time. Had we had general elections at that time, there would have been no wrong decision. If we review the national situation of that time, it would be clear to us that the atmosphere for the election would have been much more scary than the atmosphere in which Chandra Shekhar had formed the government.

* V.P. Singh Speech Said To 'Lack Conviction'

91AS1005B Calcutta THE TELEGRAPH in English 9 May 91 p 4

[Article by Pranay Sharma: "V.P. Singh Fails To Evoke 1989 Euphoria in Jat Heartland"]

[Text] Hapur (Western UP [Uttar Pradesh]), May 8—The former Prime Minister and Janata Dal leader, Mr V.P. Singh, launched the second leg of his electoral campaign in Uttar Pradesh from the Jat [farming caste] heartland today but failed to revive the euphoria and the rapport with the people that he had just two years back.

The turnouts at the meetings ranged from modest to well-attended ones, but the enthusiasm and the spontaneous response of the people were absent. At all the meetings the main thrust of his speech was social justice and how he had sacrificed his chair to defend his secular credentials. But despite the occasional claptraps and shouting of "V.P. Singh zindabad," by and large the electorate remained unresponsive.

Driving down in his white Contessa with a posse of policemen and party supporters, Mr Singh arrived at Musuri in the evening, a few hours behind schedule, and addressed a roadside meeting. The moment he stepped out of his car he was carried on the shoulders of two enthusiastic party supporters to the dais. He then gave a short speech centring around social justice and the threat posed by the communal forces in the country.

His next stop was Dhaulana village where he addressed a rural gathering. The crowd of a few thousands comprised a large number of Muslims. A green turban was tied to his head and a local Muslim leader read out a poem in praise of the "bold" stand taken by him against the communal forces.

But Mr Singh's speech was a disappointment for the gathering as he harped on his pet topic of social justice and his determination to prevent the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] from dividing the country on religious lines. "Jab hum se kahagaya, ya toh Masjid tutegi, ya toh sarkar tutegi, maine kaha sarkar kyoon na bhale tute, hum Masmid tutne nahi denge. (When I was told either the mosque or the government will be broken, I said let the government be pulled down but I will now allow anyone to destroy the mosque.)"

He also told the gathering that he would have taken a similar stand if a temple or a gurudwara was under the threat of being demolished. However, despite his attempt to sway the minorities in the area with his speech, people were seen leaving the meeting long before he had finished.

The next meeting at Hapur town was better attended, but the enthusiasm among the people was still missing. Here, Mr Singh went to great lengths explaining his party's stand on the Mandal issue. He admitted that the decision to implement job reservations for the backwards had annoyed many, but pointed out that his party was committed to it and would make all efforts to ensure social justice.

By and large, Mr Singh's speech lacked the conviction to sway the masses and the only reason he put forward while appealing to the people to vote for his candidate was that these leaders had not deserted him like those who preferred ministerial posts to remaining faithful to their principles.

* Analyst Attacks Left, V.P. Singh Alliance

91AS1005A Calcutta THE TELEGRAPH in English 12 May 91 p 8

[Article by Kewal Varma: "Left's Unholy Alliance With V.P. Singh"; italicized words as published]

[Text] One does not know whether or not it is in the stars, but the Leftists' ideological instincts fail them at critical junctures in the country's history. At a time when India's secular nationalism is facing its gravest challenge, the Leftists have entered into an unholy alliance with forces which, according to most the charitable description, are non-nationalist-forces whose chief concern is not to safeguard secular nationalism but place some sectarian interests above those of the nation. The current situation is the climax of the drift which began in 1987. It all started on the ostensibly non-ideological note of corruption in high places. The campaign was propelled by sensationalism, half-truths, rumours, character assassination, and sometime total untruths. Initially, the Left was feeling somewhat uneasy about the campaign. It scuttled the move to use that campaign for a presidential coup by Giani Zail Singh. But soon it was hustled through, mainly because the Left's anti-Congressism got the better of its ideological moorings. It also could not resist the temptation of collecting crumbs from this campaign of sensationalism.

In that phase of ideological blackout, the Left overlooked many acts of omission and commission on the part of Mr Vishwanath Pratap Singh who displayed opportunism, adventurism and a total lack of commitment. He has no ideological anchor except self-promotion. The Left ignored his act of preferring a known communalist like Syed Shahabuddin to Arif Mohammad Khan who took an extremely secular stand on the Shah Bano case at the time of the Allahabad by-election. The Leftists overlooked his cheap sensationalism when he took out a slip from his pocket and told a public gathering that it had scribbled on it the code number of Mr Rajiv Gandhi's secret account in a Swiss bank. The Left feigned ignorance when Mr V.P. Singh was holding closed-door meetings with BJP [Bharatiya Janata party] and RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh] leaders for an electoral alliance before the 1989 elections. He was doing so even though the BJP had made known its real intentions about the Ramjanmabhoomi issue at its Palampur session and through Mr Lal Krishna Advani's *shilan pooja* in a Delhi temple just before the 1989 elections.

Notwithstanding all these instances of breach of faith, the Left continued to follow Mr V.P. Singh just as a lamb follows its mother. It supported him when he announced the acceptance of the Mandal Commission report without any serious consultation with the Left. What brings out the mentality of the Left is the fact that both the CPI(M) [Communist Party of India-Marxist] and the CPI [Communist Party of India] had earlier rejected the Mandal Commission recommendations. In one of his last acts as the Prime Minister, Mr Singh doublecrossed

the Left when he secured its support for an abortive ordinance on the Ramjanmabhoomi issue by conveying to it the false impression that the ordinance had the support of the Muslim leaders as well as that of the BJP. When the choice was forced on him on the Ramjanmabhoomi issue by Mr Advani and the Left, Mr V.P. Singh chose the Left—but not because of his commitment to secularism. He calculated that if he sided with Mr Advani, he would have to play second fiddle to him, whereas in the other case the Left would play second fiddle to him. These prospects determined his choice and as a bonus he emerged as a champion of secularism.

[Boxed item] Mr Jyoti Basu will bring the virus of casteism to West Bengal through his alliance with Mr V.P. Singh. What is more, Mr Basu is prepared to mortgage the interests of West Bengal for his political alliance. [end box]

The politically and ideologically rudderless Vishwanath Pratap Singh has now fallen back on casteism and Muslim communalism to see him through in the elections. His casteism is so inhuman that when young boys and girls were committing self-immolation, he was hoping that this would help him rally the backward castes behind him. However, when backward caste landlords commit atrocities on Harijans and even go to the extent of hanging to death Harijan youths Mr V.P. Singh's sense of social justice deserts him. It is not without significance that he just did not care to visit the places of atrocities on Harijans. He did not even express a word of condemnation. In the past there have [been] many social reformers who have worked for social justice, particularly of the backward castes. The most prominent of them were Mahatama Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra and Narayana Guru in Kerala. They took particular care to avoid the sharpening of the caste divide in society. They did not subscribe to casteism as an ideology. The caste divide was sharpened by forces like the Justice Party in the South and Sir Chhotu Ram's party in Haryana which elevated casteism into a political ideology. It was this ideology of casteism which made them loyal to the British government and opposed to the national movement.

Thus, historically, those who politicised religion and castes, objectively played into the hands of the British rulers. Today those who are politicising religion and caste are also doing no service to the cause of nationalism. The Left has to answer both its conscience and all secular nationalists as to why it has chosen to follow a non-nationalist force at this critical juncture. With the de-making and de-politicisation of the working class, the Leftists' class platform has been blunted. But it still has relevance on four scores:

- It can use its strength to give a pro-poor tilt to the economic development;
- It can act as a force of social modernisation;
- It can act as a staunch defender of secularism. The Left despite all its fault is still the most sturdy secular force, cast in the Nehruvian mould in this regard;
- It can act as a standard bearer of nationalism. More communists were killed by secessionist-terrorists in Punjab than other political activists as they are perceived to be staunch defenders of India's unity and integrity.

Unfortunately, for this election the Left has chosen an ally which is weakest on all four scores. Mr V.P. Singh represents primarily the emerging land-owning classes. He provided a government which was anti-rural poor. His loan-waiving helped the land-owning peasants and through various mechanisms the poor were made to bear the burden of the cost of loan-waiving. He hugely increased the food procurement prices which caused an increase of 23 percent in wholesale prices of cereals during his regime. Since 1990 was a year of normal monsoon, this huge increase in foodgrain prices was not god-made but policy-induced. It is an established fact that an increase in prices of cereals hurts the poor the most. In fact, this country has never had as anti-poor a regime as it did during Mr V.P. Singh's premiership. The interests of the poor were also hurt because the economic policies pursuaded by him would slow down overall growth. The V.P. Singh regime also saw an increase in atrocities on Harijans, the most oppressed section of society.

[Boxed item] The Left ignored Mr V.P. Singh's act of preferring a known communalist like Syed Shahabuddin to Arif Mohammed Khan who took an extremely secular stand on the Shah Bano case at the time of the Allahabad by-election. [end box]

As far [as] secularism is concerned, Mr Vishwanath Pratap Singh could not have harmed it more. First, his appeasement of Mr L.K. Advani and, subsequently, his appeasement of the Shahi Imam, has increased the level of communalisation in the country to that of 1947 when the partition of the country took place. In the last days of Mr V.P. Singh's administration the intensity of communal riots was the highest since the Independence. The sustenance which Mr Singh provided to the BJP, directly or indirectly, is tremendous. As for nationalism, it has come under serious stress in Kashmir and Punjab. Mr V.P. Singh, particularly through Mr Jagmohan, adopted such policies as to destroy totally, politically and otherwise, pro-Indian nationalist forces in the Kashmir Valley. Today, India is totally without friends in the Valley. In Punjab he followed a policy of appeasement of the secessionist-terrorists which gave them a tremendous boost, both morally and materially. In fact, Mr Vishwanath Pratap Singh has no differences with the Punjab policy of Mr Chandra Shekhar, who appears to be set on a sell-out of Punjab to secessionist-terrorists.

What is not understandable is why the Left has agreed to go along with Mr Vishwanath Pratap Singh on casteism. The Mandal phenomenon has disrupted the democratic movement under the Left influence. Workers, peasants, middle class employees, youth and students got divided on caste lines. One rather sympathises with Ms Suhashini Ali who discovered that the Mandal issue had

disrupted her working class base. The Communist Party was born in Kanpur in 1925. The Kanpur working class could ensure the victory of Left candidates to Parliament five out of nine times that elections have taken place. The Left has the strongest base in West Bengal. Thanks to the efforts of social reformers, beginning with Chaitanya in the Bengal renaissance nursed by Gurudev Tagore, casteism has remained contained in Bengal. It had no influence, whatsoever, in politics. But now Mr Jyoti Basu will bring the virus of casteism to West Bengal through his alliance with Mr Vishwanath Pratap Singh. What is more, Mr Jyoti Basu is prepared to mortgage the interests of West Bengal for the sake of his political alliance with Mr V.P. Singh. Under the Mandal formula announced by Mr V.P. Singh, West Bengal's youths will be handicapped as far as jobs in the Central government and Central public sector undertakings are concerned as the state has no list of backward castes. If the Left could sacrifice its ideology, then the sacrifice of something as mundane as jobs for the state's youth is a small price to pay for its unholy alliance. Mr Jyoti Basu's own image also cannot be enhanced by remaining in the company of a casteist and communalist like Mr Vishwanath Pratap Singh.

* Expellees From AIADMK Form New Party

91AS0968A Madras THE HINDU in English 17 May 91 p 3

[Boldface words as published]

[Text] Madras, 16 May—The newly registered party, the Anna Puratchithalaivar Tamizhaga Munnetra Kazhagam, which comprises the expelled group from the AIADMK [All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam], seems to be faring better than expected in the campaign till now.

Though it was recognised as the AIADMK II in the Tamil Nadu Assembly by the Speaker, Mr. M. Thamizhkudimagan, the party lost its case with the Election Commission and the court on its demand for the official AIADMK symbol and flag.

Following the direction of the Commission, it registered afresh as a regional party in the State to be entitled for a common, free symbol for all its candidates. And so it earned a new name.

Its general secretary, Mr. S. Thirunavukkarasu, forged an alliance with the DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam]and was allotted nine seats in the electoral understanding reached with the party.

As the Madras High Court permitted the kazhagam to use the AIADMK flag, the one talisman of MGR [M.G. Ramachandran] followers has become a common feature for the original party as well as the rebel group.

The party has carefully selected the constituencies and the candidates in such a way that their local influence in the area, coupled with the strength of the DMK, may provide them an edge over the AIADMK.

'Umbrella' symbol: Leading the fight is Mr. Thirunavukkarasu himself, contesting for the fifth consecutive time from his native Aranthangi constituency in Pudukottai district. Though he enjoys an edge right now, his supporters are wary about the problem with the symbol. To familiarise his followers and the illiterate voters with his new 'umbrella' symbol instead of the popular 'Two Leaves' will be the main task for the campaign managers and the outcome will decide if the electorate goes by the candidate or the symbol.

Another party heavyweight in the fray is Mr. K.K.S.S.R. Ramachandran, contesting from the Sattur seat in Kamarajar district. Known for his electoral skills and 'innovative' techniques, he could also surprise the AIADMK.

Mr. S.D. Ugamchand, who inspired the spate of nominations at Madurantagam in the 1989 elections, will be testing his base this time too with the new symbol and alliance. Whether the Harijans and the villagers who titled the scales in his favour earlier, remain with him irrespective of the party affiliation, will decide his fate.

One other candidate with a chance is Mr. Murugan, trying his luck again from the Mudhukulathur constituency in Ramanathapuram district. His chances have brightened because of the three-way division of votes among the major candidates, including Mr. S. Balakrishnan of the Congress(I) and Mr. John Pandian, the controversial Harijan leader and PMK [Pattali Makkal Katchi] nominee.

Mr. Karuppasami Pandian, a one-time Jayalalitha loyalist, who was wanting to return to the AIADMK fold some time back, took the electoral plunge to find out if his support in his home town of Palayamkottai backs him when the odds are down.

Tough battle: Fighting a tough battle at Thirumayam, near Aranthangi, is Mr. Thirunavukkarasu's lieutenant, Mr. Rama Govindarajan, who is pitted against the AIADMK's Mr. S. Raghupathi. Mr. Thirunavukkarasu takes time off from his constituency to help his friends and shows a special interest in Thirumayam, to settle scores with his one-time friend and now fierce opponent, Mr. Raghupathi.

Mr. V. Raju, a member of the dissolved Assembly, has been renominated from the Kolathur seat, while Mr. K. Dhanushkodi from Rajapalayam and Mr. S. Sivaprakasam from Sendamangalam, complete the party's list of candidates.

Though at least four of them are confident of entering the Assembly, their chances hang by their symbol and its acceptance by the voters, who are also expected to pronounce their judgment on their aligning with MGR's arch rival, if only to fight Ms. Jayalalitha.

* Tamil Nadu: Pre-Poll Climate, Trends Viewed

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[An Overview: "Tamil Nadu Election Update"]

[Text] With elections to the 234 Legislative Assembly and 39 Lok Sabha constituencies only a week away in Tamil Nadu, the campaigning by political parties has reached its zenith.

Leader of the front-runner AIADMK [All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] Jayalalitha finished her first round of tours around Tamil Nadu and returned to the state capital, Madras, on Friday. The leader of DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] returned on the 11th of this month after his initial round of campaign tours. He set out on a second tour on the 14th. Vazhappadi Ramamurthi and Mooppanar, leaders of the Congress (I) have also started individual campaign trips through Tamil Nadu.

Lok Sabha Constituencies

In Tamil Nadu, 461 aspirants in 39 Lok Sabha constituencies, and 2,834 candidates from the 234 Legislative Assembly constituencies are contesting the elections. The political parties are going to all kinds of trouble to attract approximately 3.98 crore voters to support them.

DMK is basing its campaign on asking for justice by questioning the validity of its dismissal from government after only two years in power.

The Congress (I)-AIADMK alliance, which in 1989 virtually made a clean sweep of the Lok Sabha seats from Tamil Nadu by winning 38 out of 39, is returning with the intoxication of that victory.

A third force known as the PMK [Pattali Makkal Katchi], a coalition is contesting in 28 Lok Sabha constituencies, 11 of which have been reserved for fringe parties like the Muslim League under Abdul Samad.

PMK will compete for 197 Assembly seats. In the last election it participated in 30 contituencies and won in none but it had earned 7 percent of the votes.

At the present time, DMK is contesting in 29 Lok Sabha constituencies, PMK in 28, Congress (I) in 27, BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] and Muslim League are each contesting 11 constituencies, SJP [Samajwadi Janata Party] (Janata) in 15, Janata Dal [JD] in 5, Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI-M] in 3, Communist Party of India [CPI] in 2, and the United Communist Party of India, under the Congress (I) symbol, in 1 and the AIADMK in 11.

Legislative Assembly

For the Legislative Assembly, DMK is contesting in 171 constituencies, AIADMK in 168, Congress (I) in 66, BJP in 102, JD in 15, CPI(M) in 22, CPI in 10, AIADMK's revolutionary faction under Thirunavukkarasu in 9, and the Muslim League under Samad in 30.

Former Union Ministers P. Chidambaram, Arunachalam (Independent) and Prabhu are running from Sivagangai, South Kasi, and Nilagiri Lok Sabha constituencies respectively.

Congress(I) leader Vazhappadi Ramamurthi is running for the 5th time. He had been elected from the Dharmapuri constituency in 1977. He ran from the Krishnagiri Lok Sabha constituency in 1980, 1984, 1989, and won. Now for the fifth time he is campaigning from the same district.

DMK leader Karunanidhi is running from the Madras Port Greater Assembly constituency. He has already won seven times in the Legislative Assembly elections from various constituencies. This is the eighth time he is running.

This is the second time AIADMK General Secretary Jayalalitha is facing the elections. In 1989 she was successful after running from the Bodi constituency for the Legislative Assembly. This time she is running from both the Kangeyam (Periyar District) and Bargour (Dharmapuri District) Legislative Assembly constituencies.

What Happened to the Mandal Report?

DMK is campaigning for justice amidst the electorate by explaining how it was dismissed from power unfairly. Jayalalitha has been calling the DMK an evil force in her campaign. In this election, as far as campaigning goes, DMK as well as the Congress(I)-AIADMK alliance have not discussed, to any great extent, the formerly significant issues of the Mandal Commission [report], [Freedom for] Sri Lankan Tamils, or the atrocities allegedly committed by the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] in Tamil Nadu.

These issues are touched upon on rare occasions here or there by one or other of the parties.

The fact of the matter is that the people have no great expectations with regard to either the Mandal report or solving the problems of Sri Lankan Tamils. It does not appear as though the people of Tamil Nadu are greatly concerned about the issue of the Ram temple or Babar Mosque.

PMK

The PMK has announced that if it captures the number of seats required to form a government, it will place a Harijan (Untouchable-Backward) society member in the Chief Minister's office.

Propaganda

Congress(I) says to bring back stability in the Center, Congress (I) should be voted in. DMK and AIADMK Parties use the pictures of past leaders of repute such as the late Periyar, Anna, and M.G.R. [M.G. Ramachandran]. Along with the pictures of these leaders the DMK

puts up Karunanidhi's and the AIADMK, Jayalalitha's in their respective campaign posters.

The Congress(I) party uses pictures of their party leaders Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Kamaraj along with Mahatma Gandhi's photos.

In the posters used by the Congress(I)-AIADMK alliance, Jayalalitha's picture can also be seen. Janata Dal displays Kamaraj, V.P. Singh, and Sivaji Ganesan on its posters.

Janata Party uses pictures of Jayaprakash Narayan, Kamaraj, Chandra Shekhar, Subramanyam Swamy, etc. on its posters.

Since the Thirunavukkarasu faction has joined with the DMK, the campaign vehicles of his party and DMK carry the picture of M.G.R.

Audiovisual Propaganda

DMK and the Congress (I)-AIADMK alliance are employing audiovisual propaganda as well. Generally, when the leaders are present, people attend election rallies in large numbers. The other rallies do not interest the electorate. Since it is unbearably hot during the day, the contenders are going from house to house in the early hours and late evenings to seek support.

AIADMK General Secretary Jayalalitha has said that their coalition will get 200 constituent seats. DMK leader Karunanidhi is certain of more than 180 constituent seats. The PMK also feels it will get the maximum number of seats.

As far as the Lok Sabha is concerned, in general, Congress(I) has always enjoyed the popular vote in Tamil Nadu. In the old Madras Province, [the pre-faction original] Congress won 35 of the 72 constituencies. In 1957, 31 of the 41 constituencies went to the Congress party. In 1967, when Tamil Nadu became a separate state, it gained only three constituencies. In 1969, after the split in Congress, which resulted in the formation of Congress(I), it was successful in all the 9 constituencies in which it participated.

In 1977 it ran in 15 constituencies and won in 14. In 1980, it was 20 out of 22; in 1984, 25 out of 26; and in 1989, 26 out of 27.

In 1984, AIADMK won in all the 12 constituencies in which it participated. That party had gotten only two seats in 1980. In 1989, the Congress(I)-AIADMK alliance won in 38 constituencies.

DMK did not get even one seat in that election!